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UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000337

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ARMED ROBBERY OF AMCIT 2/10/2006: MORE THAN JUST  
OCCASIONAL CRIME IN SAN JOSE

REF: SAN JOSE 327

1. (SBU) On February 13, 2006 Post was informed of the fifth reported armed vehicle robbery (since December 2005) of individuals coming from the Juan Santamaria Airport in San Jose. RSO believes that thieves are targeting cars from the airport and following them until they have reached an isolated spot to conduct their attack on a vehicle. One of the most common criminal scams in Costa Rica is that of the "Good Samaritan" scam, where the assailants puncture/severely damage a rental car tire, then follow the vehicle until the tire blows out or the victim is forced to pull over. The "Good Samaritans" then offer to help change the tire of the potential victims, then steal key suitcases or a backpacks holding money, passports, and camera equipment. It seems criminals may be coming up with different variations of this scam. In some reports, a car pulls up next to the victims' vehicle and points to the tire, then the victim pulls over or the perpetrators block from the target vehicle from the front. In the past five incidents reported to the Consular Section since December 2005, guns have been used and some vehicles have been stolen, with three of the five incidents involving persons driving rental vehicles. The one common denominator is that all vehicles were departing the airport. This message focuses on the most recent incident of armed robbery reported to the Consulate, with one of the victims an AmCit just arriving in country on February 10, 2006. ARSO interviewed the victims of this robbery at the Embassy on February 13, 2006. End Summary.

2. (SBU) On the morning of February 13, 2006, ARSO interviewed Josh Rosen (Victim - PROTECT). Victim is an AmCit from New York who reported to ARSO that on Friday, February 10, 2006, he and his wife, a Costa Rican National and a U.S. Legal Permanent Resident, had arrived from Newark, New Jersey at 2130 hours. ROSEN and his wife were picked up from the Juan Santamaria Airport by his Mother in-law and Wife's Grandmother. While exiting on a ramp, a car from behind sped past them and stopped short to cut them off from the front. At this point, the Mother in-law, driving a Suzuki Sidekick, tried to put the vehicle in reverse with negative results. Three men exited the blocking vehicle and approached the target vehicle wearing ski masks and displaying guns. The victims were told to exit the vehicle; as they did, one man lifted the hood of the vehicle to make it look as if the vehicle had broken down. The victims reported that two other vehicles drove by as they were being robbed. The assailants took out all of the luggage in the vehicle, which was visible through the vehicle rear window. Victim stated that the assailants tried to remove the grandmother from the car, but the Mother in-law interceded, advising that the Grandmother had a bad back and other medical conditions. The assailants complied with the request from the Mother in-law and left the Grandmother in the vehicle. Victim told ARSO all the luggage was stolen, which included laptops, cell phones, clothing, passports, and other documents. AmCit's Wife reported to the police the approximate value of the loss a \$20,000. The victims immediately called in the theft of the credit cards and canceled their credit card accounts. Charges on the stolen cards were made at four different locations prior to the cards being canceled.

3. (SBU) RSO, CONGEN, and DCONGEN will meet with members of the American Chamber of Commerce on 14 February to discuss strategies for dealing with rising crime in Costa Rica. Per reftel, RSO is concerned about this type of criminal activity in San Jose, which is occurring in areas where Police patrols/coverage should be robust but appears to be very light.

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